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DE RUEHIN #0666/01 1590930
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 080930Z JUN 09
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1691
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9227
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0656

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000666

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DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S CAIRO

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage June 6-8 on the speculation over President Ma Ying-jeou possibly doubling as KMT chairman after July; on the reshuffle of board members in the Formosa Petrochemical Corp; and on several issues concerning the livelihood of people in Taiwan.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" said President Obama's speech showed his sincerity and courage to resolve the problems between the United States and the Muslim world. The speech also helped to improve the United States' international image, the article added, but still, it failed to provide practical measures as to how the problems will be resolved. A column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" said the key to judge whether President Obama's speech is successful or not depends on the responses of religious leaders in Tehran and the hawks in Israel. A column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" raised various questions concerning President Obama's speech and said the Muslims of the world still hesitate to believe in what President Obama said. The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said the bone of contention is Palestine, and Obama's wish to create a Palestinian state might take hundreds of years to be fulfilled. End summary.

A) "Obama in Cairo"

Columnist Antonio Chiang wrote in his column in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (6/8):

"[U.S. President Barack] Obama's speech at Cairo University was interrupted by enthusiastic applause several times. There has never been a Western leader in history who has received such high expectation in the Arabic world. This was a very successful public diplomacy activity. However, nobody dares to be optimistic about how Obama's eloquence is able to cross the chasm in the real world.
...

"Obama mentioned his personal experience, his many Muslim relatives, his childhood in Indonesia and the peace and dignity that he found in Islam. As president, he has the obligation to try his best to remove the bias against Islam. At the same time, he also asked the Islamic world to remove its bias against the United States. These words were sincere from within and thus appeared so externally and have found their echo [in the audience] to a great extent. However, when an abstract and perceptual speech runs into practical issues, the outcome [of the speech] will change beyond recognition, similar to an egg hitting a rock. Obama showed his lack of confidence when he talked about the Israel-Palestine problem.

"He showed his deep sympathy toward Palestine's situation. He said 'for more than 60 years the Palestinians have endured the pain of dislocation...they endure the daily humiliations that come with occupation...the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. And America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.' Muslims were happy after hearing these words. However, he emphasized Israel's right to exist. He said 'America's bond with

Israel is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a [tragic] history that cannot be denied.' Such a statement has been spoken by [former U.S. Presidents George W.] Bush and [Bill] Clinton and was thus nothing new at all.

"Obama said during this trip, he wanted to speak out the truth that most people did not wish to hear. However, Muslims are distributed among more than fifty countries in the world. While every country's situation is different, one can hardly speak of Muslims as a whole. The content of Obama's speech is too broad. He raised many issues but did not dare to touch on concrete resolutions. Obama's coming to the Arab world as a black president has already crossed the gap of race. Now, he tries to cross the gap of religion. The image of such a broad mind, courage and sincerity must have been deeply imprinted in numerous Muslims' [hearts]. Even if the effect is not as expected, it can at least eliminate prejudice and will do a great job in improving the United States' international image."

B) "Obama's Unaccomplished Speech"

A column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] wrote (6/6):

"U.S. President [Barack] Obama urged the Islamic world to renew the relationship with the United States. Obama reached out the olive branch, but the key to whether the speech will be able to make history relies on whether the religious leaders in Tehran and those hawks in Israel want to accept it or not. Israeli officials, for example, have claimed that they will not stop the construction of settlements in the West Bank. ...

"One may well say that the goodwill and empathy delivered in the speech is rare among United States presidents through the ages. Leaders of Islamic countries that have diplomatic ties with the United States all feel this clearly. However, the speech is very vague to people in these [Islamic] countries. Iran will not stop its development of nuclear weapons only because Obama's urging. The Taliban will not stop recruiting new blood only because of his condemnation. ...

"Obama has delivered an outstanding speech. However, the importance of the speech does not really lie in setting the tone for now but rather on whether he [Obama] is able to make the content of the speech into policies in the future. In other words, the speech is as yet unaccomplished."

C) "Muslims Listen to Obama's Words and Then Will Watch His Deeds"

The "International Lookout" column in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 150,000] wrote (6/6):

"... [President] Obama has been planning for this Middle East trip for a long time, with the intent of earning the Islamic world's favorable impression toward the United States, making a breakthrough on the Iran-Palestinian issue, and hoping that the Arab nations will not oppose the United States' policies toward Iraq and Afghanistan. ... [Obama's speech] sounded very good, but will his deeds match what he said? Obama said, 'America is not -- and never will be -- at war with Islam.' Here is the question: Is Iraq part of the Islamic world? Has Saddam Hussein ever been in possession of weapons of mass destruction and thus posed a threat to the United States? Then why did the United States want to declare war against Iraq?

"Obama also said, 'America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.' But the question is: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Administration showed no interest at all in the 'two-state' doctrine concerning Palestinian people building their own country, and he only said [his country] will 'co-exist peacefully' with the Palestinians. Why didn't Obama refute Netanyahu? Obama also said Iran has the right to access to peaceful nuclear power. Regarding this, Iran's spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said: 'hatred against the United States will not change simply because of the language. What is required are deeds. No wonder 'Al Jazeera' television Arabic service said that Obama's

performance in Cairo 'has nothing new at all.'

"How then should [the United States] renew [its relationship] with Muslims? Since the happening of the 'September 11th terrorist attack,' the Evangelicals, who scrupulously observe conventional Christianity doctrines, become the biggest religious group and the mainstream religion in the United States. [Former U.S. President George W.] Bush liked to use religious language more than any other former United States president, and the language he used was directly from the Evangelicals. Evangelicals regard Islamic extremism the same as [they do] all of Islam. Can Obama reverse such a trend?

"Obama said America's 'bond with Israel is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a [tragic] history that cannot be denied.' Can Muslims in the world still believe that Obama wants to reconcile with Islam after they hear this kind of talk?"

D) "New Beginning for U.S., Muslims Ties"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (6/8):

"President Barack Obama sought a 'new beginning' between the United States and Muslims around the world in a major speech he delivered in Cairo last week. ... It is an about-face demarche from his predecessor George W. Bush's new conservative policy of confrontation, that got the United States in the quagmire of Afghanistan and Iraq, from which Obama is doing what he can to get out. It is easier said than done to make the United States and the Muslim world not mutually exclusive. ...

"The United States cannot forsake Israel, which by far the greater majority of the Muslim Arabs wish to oust from Palestine and restore to its status ante bellum. Obama has committed to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He will follow up the new beginning with all-out efforts to create a Palestinian state side-by-side with Israel. But he can't because Israel is opposed to it. All that Israel can concede is a peaceful coexistence, not two states. The beginning could be initiated without difficulty. It may take years, decades or even longer to see the Arabs and Israelis live in peace in their respective states in Palestine. There won't be a shortcut solution to the conflict rooted in historical forces

for hundreds of years."

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